



**TESTIMONY OF
Sarah LaFrenz, President
Kansas Organization of State Employees
March 22, 2021**

Chairman Johnson and Members of the House Insurance and Pensions Committee,

As President of the Kansas Organization of State Employees (KOSE), I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2111, which permits State Corrections Security Officers to affiliate with the Kansas Police and Firemen's Retirement System (KP&F). I would like to also extend my appreciation to Rep. Proctor for introducing this legislation.

State Corrections Officers carry out fundamentally different work than most employees affiliated with the main plan of the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System (KPERS). In ordinary times, Corrections Officers operate in a high-stress work environment, cover for staffing shortages with grueling mandatory overtime, and put their lives at risk each day. These men and women make innumerable sacrifices on a shoestring budget to keep our communities safe.

These are just a few of the reasons why this is not the first time the proposal outlined in HB 2111 has been considered by the legislature with essentially universal support. During the 2018 Kansas Legislative Session, the Kansas House of Representatives in several instances advanced similar proposals to the Senate. The original bill (2018 HB 2448) passed the House on February 21, 2018 on a Final Action vote of 113-9. Unfortunately, that measure, or similar subsequent efforts to pass that measure, did not result in a bill landing on the Governor's desk and our work on this matter remains unfinished.

Of course, much has changed since the 2018 session. A global pandemic has upended the daily lives of nearly everyone in the world. Specifically, public health officials, elected officials, and journalists have been especially alarmed by the devastation that COVID-19 has wrought in congregate settings such as long-term care facilities and corrections facilities. The Department of Corrections has reported at least five staff deaths due to COVID-19 and nearly 1300 cases. Officers who have survived COVID-19 may suffer from long-term health conditions that medical experts are only beginning to understand. Despite the new threat posed by COVID-19, coupled with the usual hardships of understaffing and dangerous work environments, our corrections officers have gotten up each day and done their duty.

Accounting for these facts and weighing the risks they take every day for Kansas we feel the benefits of KP&F are more appropriate for our Corrections Officers than that of regular KPERS. Passing HB 2111 would also provide a powerful tool for the Kansas Department of Corrections to use as it seeks to achieve one of the legislature's longstanding public policy goals: retain and recruit quality staff.

On behalf of KOSE, I urge the committee to favorably report HB 2111.

Thank for your consideration of this testimony.